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## **JACKSON KICKSOFF NATIONWIDE DISCUSSION ON HEALTH CARE THROUGHOUT MISSISSIPPI**

*Citizens' recommendations to be considered by Congress, White House*

**Washington, D.C.** – The citizens of Jackson, MS will kick off a series of 8 dialogues throughout the state of Mississippi on health care in America. The community meetings are presented by the Citizens' Health Care Working Group and will be held on **Wednesday, February 22, 2006**, from 8:30 am - 12:30 pm at the Jackson Medical Mall, 350 West Woodrow Wilson Drive, Jackson, MS. The meeting is free and open to the public, but registration is requested. Registration is available at [www.citizenshealthcare.gov](http://www.citizenshealthcare.gov) or by calling 601-982-0673. Mississippi State University's Extension Service is facilitating and assisting in the promotion of the meetings taking place throughout the state. For information on community meetings in Mississippi, contact 662-325-4003.

"Mississippi will be a rural voice for the nation," said Rachel Welborn, Community Health Coordinator with Mississippi State University's Extension Service. "We need representatives from all walks of life to make time in their schedules to attend one of these meetings and express their opinions."

The community meeting will feature a multimedia presentation that provides information on the nation's health care system including problems related to cost, quality, and access to care. This will be followed by more focused discussions in small groups. Participants will share their ideas about how to improve the health care system.

"The current system is obviously not working well for all Americans, even the most affluent," stated Dr. Aaron Shirley, an associate professor in pediatrics at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and a member of the Working Group. "It takes all of us coming together to make a change for the better. And that's what these meetings are all about. Don't miss this opportunity to let your voice be heard."

Community members, especially those unable to come to the meeting are urged to take advantage of several important online features designed to overcome physical and practical barriers to citizen participation. The Public Comment Center, Citizens' Blogs, and Discussion Forums, are found at [www.citizenshealthcare.gov](http://www.citizenshealthcare.gov). They are all ways to enable a more inclusive public comment and debate so that citizens can share their opinions with one another and make their views known to the Working Group in order to strengthen the recommendations provided to the President and Congress.

The Working Group, a nonpartisan group authorized by the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, is charged with listening to the views of the American people and developing recommendations for the President and Congress to provide U.S. citizens with "Health Care that Works for All Americans." The *Health Report to the American People*, was released in October and serves as a basis to engage the American people in a dialogue on health care access, cost and quality issues. The Working Group consists of 15 members --14 citizens of diverse backgrounds from across the country, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

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